

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

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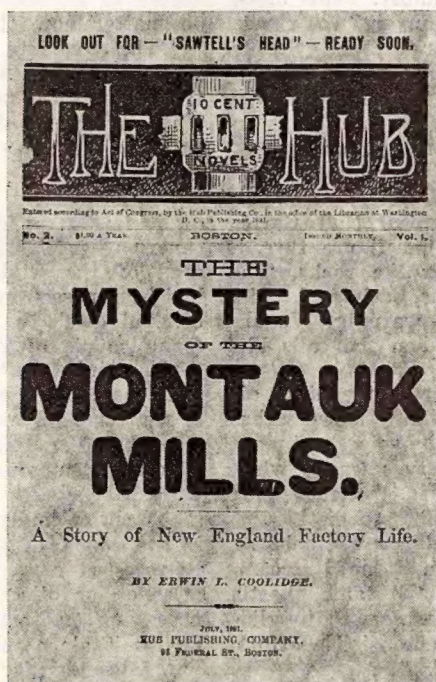
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Whole No. 447

The Anatomy of Dime Novels

No. 17 Frontier and Revolutionary War Stories
That Missed Pluck and Luck

By J. Edward Leithead



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 120

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The Anatomy of Dime Novels

No. 17 Frontier and Revolutionary War Stories That Missed Pluck and Luck

By J. Edward Leithead

"A sharp exclamation burst from Kit Carter's lips as that ruddy light shone across the water:

"The curtain, Nell, the curtain! The red demons are on our trail, and your fire will lead them to us. Ah, that's better," satisfaction in his voice as a curtain of tanned buffalo hide fell in place over the cavern entrance. He added, as the others disembarked:

"To your care, Nell, I entrust the ladies—General Leigh's daughter and his niece, and remember, sister mine, that we are all hungry, so please prove your skill as a cook. Steaks from the buck I shot yesterday will do nicely. Folks, my sister, Nell Carter."

"She was welcoming her guests, the two lieutenants coming in with Kit, when a weird outcry drew all again to the entrance. Nell Carter pointed to a mounted figure threading its way among the rocks. 'The Phantom Rider,' she exclaimed. 'Listen to her wail of warning. We are indeed in danger when she calls like that.'

"There had arisen on the night air a long-drawn wailing shriek that froze the blood in the veins, and peering through the misty, uncanny white light that surrounded the equestrian figure, they were able to distinguish a woman riding a large white horse, her floating robe and long, streaming locks being of the same ghostly hue. Horse and rider seemed to glide through space with no visible effort; it almost seemed the wraith-like steed's hoofs never touched the ground.

"The Phantom Rider,' Kit echoed his sister. 'Her warnings are never false, never fail. The redskins have tracked us—listen to that!'

"The sound to which Kit called attention was the hooting of an owl, that was quickly followed by another and yet another, until it seemed the entire shore and the cliff above were alive with the harsh-voiced, solemn-eyed birds. But the young ranger had dwelt too long in the very heart of nature to be deceived by an Indian, no matter how clever the imitation.

"The varmints overdo the thing,' muttered Kit. 'Not in miles could there be that many owls at one place. Where is the Indians' boasted cunning that they do such a stupid trick.'

The newcomers settle down for the night in the yonder recesses of the cavern where Kit and his sister, children of the wilderness whose lives had been passed in the midst of danger, had dwelt in reasonable security for a couple of years.

"The only way this secret abode could be entered was from the natural platform of rock, the three other sides being naught save steep walls of granite surrounded by water that rushed headlong to the falls, the lake's outlet emptying into the stream in the middle of which was the deeply recessed cave. To reach the cave a canoe or other kind of boat was necessary and even then a stranger trying it alone might be swept over the falls. So far the Sioux hadn't attempted attack by the water route, but they could make it uncomfort-

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able for those in the cavern in shooting into the entrance from the surrounding rocky heights.

Such a bombardment suddenly engaged the attention of Kit and his sister, and while they were replying with rifles from behind a log dragged across the opening, the two young cavalry officers joined them with army Colts. Not much damage was done on either side, and as the smoke drifted away, Kit thought of his big canoe outside, tied to a rock by the painter at its bow. He always dragged the canoe inside the cave for safe-keeping, but had forgotten it after landing the four fugitives at the hide-away. Expecting to find it riddled by some of the bullets fired by the Sioux from the high rocks, he couldn't find it at all. It was gone . . .

But sometime later he learned where it had gone. Screams from the depths of the cave sent him and Nell and the cavalymen back to the farthest recess and there by torchlight, a pine knot thrust in a crack in the wall, a hand-to-hand struggle began. Black Wolf, a war chief of the Sioux, and Renaud, the renegade, had, with a number of braves, landed from canoes above the entrance under cover of the riflefire, cutting the painter on Kit's canoe as they passed, flattened in the bottom of their own frail crafts, with arms extended over the sides to propel them through the water.

"The three, boy ranger and cavalymen, made a brave and determined fight, but it ended as most unequal fights must, in the defeat of the smaller party. All five were bound with deerhide thongs, Chief Black Wolf furious because Nell Carter had somehow managed to escape, which pleased Kit immensely. Smart girl! he thought, she'll be loose to help us—maybe.

"To the delight of the young ranger, who was trying to work the thongs off his rather small hands against a sharp rock in the cavern wall, the redskins discovered a small cask of brandy, a present to Kit from a trader to whom he had done a small service. With his tomahawk a brave

broke in the head of the cask, and all, Black Wolf and Renaud included, swallowed great draughts of the fiery stuff as if it were water.

"His pulse throbbing with new hope, Kit strove manfully to loosen his bonds and felt the thongs slip until he was able to draw his hands through them. He bent slightly in the guttering torchlight to free his legs. The low, plaintive call of the whip-poor-will arose outside.

"'Nell signalling me,' he thought. 'Together we can do more to help the others than if she tries alone.'

"He saw Renaud looking at him, and suddenly he knew it was time to go if he intended to escape—recapture meant instant death. He bent and ran, straight for the cave's mouth. Renaud and Black Wolf immediately staggered in pursuit. Guns banged, smoke filled the cavern.

"Dashing through the rude doorway Kit saw his own canoe floating past. By freakish circumstance it seemed to offer a way of escape from the red men blundering at his heels. He judged the distance as well as he could in the moon glow over the lake, his weight, at the pace he was going, nearly capsizing the big canoe as he struck it and sending it in the direction of the falls. It chilled Kit to see that there were no paddles in the canoe, as without one he could not turn the light craft from its course in the strong current.

"To return to the cave weaponless was death, to go over the falls was death . . . he rose in stooping posture, hearing the disappointed yells of the Sioux on the rocky ledge, the enraged shouting of Renaud well above the rest. Swiftly the craft of birch bark swept over the falls, the boy ranger going with it. Down into the boiling, raging waters below . . . Renaud and Black Wolf, with the brandy-fired warriors, turned back to the captives in the cave.

"As Kit went over the falls, the savages drowned the outcry of his sister on the rocky heights. She thought it was the last of him . . . broken-hearted, she turned her attention to the cavern; if her brother was

dead, still she would give what aid she could to the two young officers and the Leigh girls. She and Kit together might have rescued the four despite the odds against them. Nell had her rifle and a full cartridge belt. As day approached she saw the Indians hustling the prisoners into the canoes by which the red men had invaded the lake region.

Nell opened fire on the last canoe in line, wounding a huge redskin whose sudden lunge to his feet upset the frail craft, dumping all in the lake. Bottom side up it drifted down toward the rocky ledge. The wounded Sioux, helped by his companions, made it to land when they were forced to swim. Later Nell captured the boat for her own use, picking up one floating paddle to drive it inshore.

The Sioux had left ponies in a thicket, in charge of a single brave. They mounted as daylight burst upon the lake, and Black Wolf and Renaud had a heated argument about the girl captives. It started when the chief fumed over the fact that Kit Carter's golden-haired sister had escaped the war party.

"'Black Wolf's lodge,' said the war chief, 'is very large, very dark and empty. He will bring the Yellow Hair to his lodge, where she will make it bright as a summer sun. There is room for the Dark Eyes, too, in Black Wolf's lodge,' he went on, meaning Beth Leigh.

Renaud argued that the arrangement had been for the two Leigh cousins to be held in the Sioux village only until the renegade had made a ransom deal with the general. Black Wolf shook his head. That was all changed since he'd seen Beth; she and Nell would make a fine pair of squaws for "the great chief."

"Renaud cursed him under his breath, 'For a cheeky redskin you take the prize! You're a sort of copper-colored Brigham Young, but I'll fool you yet.'

Watching from the brush, Nell Carter saw the war party mount—there were enough spare ponies to give each of the captives one—and ride off, she being unable to follow at

once because her horse was at the other hideaway where Kit left his own charger and the cavalry mounts and pack-horse. She started walking to the cave.

Black Wolf's band made straight for the distant Sioux village, but a buffalo herd crossed their path halfway there, and the sudden opportunity to gather meat caused the Indians to hitch the mounts of the prisoners in a nearby ravine and remove the fringed buckskin covers from their guns. McMurdo and Campbell were greatly excited, though concealing it, by these preparations for a hunt. Apparently Black Wolf and Renaud, the two leaders, weren't asking any brave to give up the sport of the chase and leave a guard with the captives. They were securely tied to the ponies, and the ponies in turn hitched to dwarf trees . . . how could the whites escape if left alone? And they had no weapons.

But once the Indians were lost in the thick dust of the stampeding buffaloes, and the banging of guns signalled the fall of mighty bulls and scarcely less majestic cows, the two lieutenants, with Winnie and Beth each bending low on pony's neck between the men, were racing out the opposite end of the ravine. The dwarf shrubs had been uprooted by the frantic efforts of the Indian ponies, jabbed by the spurred heels of the officers, who still wore their cavalry boots, the Indian-raised animals already made edgy by the alien odor of the whites. As it turned out, they couldn't have picked a better direction for flight. The Sioux, busy with their buffalo-killing, didn't know they were gone until much later. But not so late that the fugitives' trail couldn't be followed by the keen-eyed red men.

"In the meantime, how fared it with Kit Carter, the boy ranger, to whom the word fear was unknown? Did he go to his death over the falls? To be candid, he did not expect to live through the ordeal as his canoe shot downward. But a ray of hope flashed through his mind as he tried to keep the canoe from overturning.

"Some week before he had stood on the bank of the outlet when a section of what had been a log raft swept past him, a frightened deer standing on it, the whole being swallowed up in mist and foam a moment later. The deer was not drowned, for he had seen the terrified animal swimming for the shore below the falls some ten minutes afterward.

"Now he and his canoe were enveloped in a sheet of mist and foam, the thunder of the falls deafening him, and last of all his craft shot forward, gliding smoothly across the pool of calm water that lay at some distance beyond the mighty cataract. He had been snatched from the jaws of death.

"Half an hour's brisk walk brought him to the cave where the horses were, and it was the work of a very few minutes to kindle a fire and dry his wet buckskins. He ate something, got out one of the extra rifles and ammunition he left here for emergencies, all the while thinking about his late companions, especially his sister and her whom he called 'flower of the wilderness,' Winnie Leigh. As soon as he'd rested up after hours of strenuous activity, he'd saddle his horse and go back to the lake. He wrapped himself in a blanket and was soon asleep, undisturbed by the restlessness of the horses. He slept with his rifle at hand.

"Kit, exhausted, slept longer than he intended. Perhaps it was as well. he was aroused by outcries and the pounding of hoofs. He sprang up and ran to the cave entrance, rifle in hand. Away down on the west plain that stretched below the spot where he stood, a little party of five riders were fleeing from a band of mounted, befeathered savages. Five whites, only one of whom, a girl, seemed to have a weapon.

"It's Nell!" he exclaimed, 'and the others—sure, McMurdo and Campbell and the Leigh cousins.'

"There was a lot Kit didn't know that had occurred since he left these people at the lakeside, but he understood that the Indians were led by Black Wolf and Renaud; and his cour-

ageous sister, probably thinking him dead, was guiding the weaponless party toward the hideaway, where they would find firearms for all and be able to put up a defense.

"Kit dropped to one knee as the racing fugitives neared with the Indians in hot pursuit. His rifle smoked and a brave went backward off his spotted pony. Another bounced on the prairie sod as Kit caught him in his sights. It was the start of a smoky set-to at the hideaway. The Indians were astonished to see Kit in fighting trim, back from the dead it seemed. Finally, the Sioux were driven off, for not half the original war party of Black Wolf was present, some having gone on to the village laden with the spoils of the buffalo hunt, while the chief and Renaud, finding the four prisoners gone, followed the tracks that led toward the second cave. Nell Carter, having caught a stray Indian pony for herself, had cut the trail of the Leigh cousins and two bluecoats a short time before the Indians showed up.

"Kit was told about the buffalo hunt which had given his army friends their chance to get away from the Sioux. All this give and take, bringing Kit up to date, occurred after the redskins had quit the fight, apparently on account of their losses. It was with regret that the Carters and their new-found friends saw Black Wolf and Renaud ride away presumably unscathed."

The decision was made for Kit and his sister to join the two young officers in escorting Winnie and Beth Leigh to Fort Leigh, where already the general would be wondering what had happened to the two girls, the Indian guide under suspicion of treachery, and the two shave-tails of his staff.

"It was late afternoon when the party of six, four of them now riding cavalry mounts, set forth on the road to Fort Leigh. No Indian had been seen for some time before they left the cave, nor was the war party thought to pose a threat along the way. Kit blamed himself afterward for being so absorbed in beautiful

Winnie Leigh, "the flower of the wilderness," who rode at his side, that he wasn't his usually vigilant self.

"Kit's party had no warning . . . one minute the prairie was peaceful, the high grass waving in a light wind, the next there were blood-chilling yells from more than a score of tawny throats and coppery forms sprang from the ground where they had lain in wait. There wasn't much shooting; it was evident the Sioux wanted to recapture them alive, the men for torture, the women for worse than torture. Black Wolf was boasting what a great chief he was, gazing with malign satisfaction at the five helpless forms on the ground, three men and two girls; he suddenly realized that Kit Carter's sister, whom he had vowed to take as his squaw, was not there.

"Where Yellow Hair?" he demanded of Kit, and the boy ranger, knowing Nell had been at the tail of the cavalcade with Lieutenant Campbell, surmised she must have dropped out of sight at the moment the ambush was sprung.

"The Yellow Hair," replied Kit, 'went back to the lakeside. I'm guiding these army folks to Fort Leigh since Renaud lost the job.'

"Renaud was near enough to hear this. 'We can pick up Yellow Hair any time, chief,' he said to Black Wolf, knowing there wasn't anyone to pay ransom money for Nell Carter. 'Let's be getting these slippery white eyes to camp while we've got a-hold of 'em. Soon be dark, anyway.'

"Black Wolf remounted his pinto and a brave handed up the bound Beth, while Lieutenant McMurdo's eyes burned with baffled fury. Likewise Kit Carter raged inwardly as he witnessed Winnie in the embrace of Renaud as the horses started moving. Nell Carter saw them pass by above her as she lay in a grass-fringed buffalo wallow, her well-trained horse, exchanged for the Indian pony, flat under the overhang, although she kept cautious fingers pressed to its nostrils. This girl of the frontier could meet an emergency as bravely as her brother, and at the instant of

attack she had fallen back toward the wallow, rapped her horse on its knees with her quirt-handle to make it lie down. Foreseeing that the number of Sioux must triumph over Kit and the army people, Nell at once figured that if she could keep her freedom she might help them later. When the war party had passed her, she mounted again and trailed it, holding a discreet distance between herself and the Indians.

"Two hours' hard riding brought Black Wolf's band of raiders to the Sioux encampment, their arrival causing a big uproar, the barking of dogs, shouts of children and the harsh notes of the women's voices foretelling the captives' fate. The two Leigh girls were hurried into one tent where they were guarded by the ugliest-looking squaw that human eyes ever beheld. The young ranger and the cavalry officers were hustled into another tepee that was guarded by two sullen, low-browed savages.

"After a period of gloomy talk among themselves, Kit pointed out that it was possible his resourceful sister would come to their aid, even lone-handed, the three male prisoners were led out of the tepee by a half dozen braves, to what seemed to be a large square in the middle of the village, where the whole tribe apparently was gathered, a noisy, glitter-eyed, savage assemblage. Numerous fires had been kindled about the camp, and an especially large bonfire in the center of the square.

"Kit's sharp eyes saw everything, even to the three stakes driven into the ground side by side, a huge mound of dry brushwood in front of each; and stealing a glance at the young soldiers, he saw they too had discovered the signs of torture to come, but were as calm as if in their own snug quarters at Fort Leigh.

"The Sioux seemed to be waiting for someone, their glittering black eyes wandering from the captives to a large tepee of finely dressed buffalo hide, that was a little apart from the rest. Time and again their gaze sought it, while the braves with the prisoners bound the three whites

to the stakes. Suddenly the mob voice was stilled and the Indians, men and women, stood like bronze statues.

"A form clad in fur-trimmed robes, but bowed with the weight of years, emerged from the lodge, supported on either side by a young warrior, and walked slowly to the seat reserved for him, sinking into it was a deep sigh, the long, black plumes in his headdress nodding, the heavy silver bands on his wrists and ankles seeming too great a weight for his feeble strength.

"This was Ancient Sun, the beloved sage of the tribe, a wise and just man according to his lights, and revered by all. Raising his head after having been lost in reverie for some moments, he asked gravely:

"What is it that you would have, my children? Bring before me the captives.' Apparently his sight was dim, for the warrior at his right stooped and pointed to the stake-bound Kit, almost in front of the sage. 'Ha, whom have we here?' he gave a visible start. 'The White Panther did ye say, my son? Then he must die, for he is the enemy of the Dakota, and 'tis just and right that he should follow in the footsteps of brave warriors he has sent to the shadow land of our people long before they were ready to go. And these others . . . ha, pony soldiers! They, too, must die! I have spoken, let my command be obeyed, for 'tis well,' and rising, the aged Sioux wrapped his robe close about him, then, leaning heavily on the arms of his attendants, he slowly withdrew, leaving the tribe standing silently about the helpless captives.

"Renaud, the half-breed renegade, stepped up to Kit and spoke loud enough for the soldiers at the adjacent stakes to hear:

"Reckon that fixes your come-uppance, White Panther and you hoss soldiers. Don't worry about Nellie, Kit, we'll see to it she ain't forgot. Any last message, I'll be glad to carry it—'

"The renegade didn't quite understand Kit's look as the taunting went on without working the young rang-

er into a helpless rage.

"'Takin' it calm, huh, Kit? . . .'

"A shrill screech, followed by a wild burst of horse laughter, startled the renegade and Black Wolf, who stood not far from Renaud. Kit Carter shifted his glance with the other two in the direction whence the sound came and beheld a figure coming toward them whose appearance was to say the least startling, not to add terrifying to one who did not know the customs of the Indians.

"Whether the wild-looking creature was man or woman, only a savage or a white ranger like Kit could say, for the head and face were concealed by a hideous wolf's head, the white fangs grinning frightfully, the red glass buttons replacing the animal's eyes seeming to send out a fiery glow, the sharp ears giving it a life-like, wild beast look. A bright red blanket hung from the shoulders, enveloping the entire form, and around the waist, wrists and ankles were twined the skin of a rattlesnake, strings of shells and the teeth and claws of beasts and birds.

"'Tis Vashti, the wise medicine woman,' said Black Wolf, as with another shrill cry the crone came running toward the stake-bound prisoners, waving her arms in the air. In doing so she lifted the red blanket enough to reveal a bright, keen hatchet hanging from her belt and a long skinning knife. But what she did not disclose was that she also carried three revolvers strapped to her shoulders. Seemingly the medicine woman placed as much, if not more, reliance on her weapons, than on her herbs and barks, which she was never without.

"Burn the palefaces,' she raved, 'and scatter their accursed ashes to the four winds—'

"As suddenly as she had started shouting, flailing her arms and dancing about the captives, just as suddenly did she stop her dizzy whirling and dropping on her knees begin searching among the grasses and leaves on the edge of the torture ground, mumbling and muttering to herself, cursing the white eyes.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!" she burst out, chuckling and cackling as she bounded to her feet and flew at the boy ranger as if she intended gouging out his eyes with her thumbs. Instead, she twined the fingers of one hand in Kit's long hair, and with the other lifted the wolf's head covering her own—just a little way—and Kit received the surprise of his life, for in spite of the red clay thickly plastered over the small portion of the face revealed, he instantly recognized his sister in the supposed medicine woman.

"In silence the eyes of brother and sister met in understanding, then Nell withdrew her hand from his head, and, yelling shrilly, began to circle the three prisoners in a wild dance. Black Wolf and Renaud, enjoying the performance as well as the assembled warriors and squaws, stood back to allow her plenty of room.

"About the fourth time around, taunting and insulting the white men, 'Vashti,' covering the move with her red blanket, made a swipe at the bonds of Kit and the cavalymen with the skinning knife as she passed each one. All three stood stiffly, as if still bound, and the next time around, her actions again cloaked by the folds of the blanket, six-shooters met the eager grasp of ranger and soldiers.

"The 'medicine woman' sprang clear as the three men, acting in concert, jumped away from the stakes that had held them and started running. The assembled Indians for a moment stared dumbly at the empty posts. Black Wolf and Renaud caught off guard as much as any of them. The released prisoners were bounding like deer past the mystified throng, each fistng a Colt but holding fire until the Indians should start in pursuit.

"The sight of those flying figures brought the Sioux quickly to their senses, and with howls of rage they streamed after the trio. Nell Carter had started running with the escapees and Kit thought she was still with them, but Nell had caught sight of the real Vashti, who somehow had got loose from bondage and was com-

ing toward the imposter like a fighting fury. The raging hag, closing in on Nell and snatching off the wolf's head, revealing Nell's flowing golden locks and caused Black Wolf, in the van of pursuers, to wrench Vashti from her intended victim. Bound hand and foot, Nell was carried to Black Wolf's lodge while the chase of Kit and the cavalymen continued.

"When the three young men made their daring dash for freedom, they headed straight into the forest bounding the village on the northwest. So fast they ran in their desperate break-away that only the fleetest Sioux were on their track as the darkness of the timber closed about them. A shot or two, drawing grunts from the warriors who stopped the lead, halted their pursuers temporarily. And Kit, missing his sister and knowing she must have fallen captive herself or, even worse, been tomahawked for the trick she had played on the Sioux, consulted with McMurdo and Campbell about what to do. The Leigh cousins were still prisoners back there in the village, and probably Nell also.

"I'm more used to scouting round Indian camps than you fellows," Kit said, 'and while the way to Fort Leigh is open, McMurdo, how about you and Campbell heading for it and bring on the cavalry. It's even possible General Leigh, worrying over those girls, has started out with troops looking for 'em. You fellows will have to walk, there being no chance to get a couple horses—'

"We don't mind that, Kit," broke in McMurdo, 'but we don't like leaving you alone.'

"Forget that," said the young ranger, 'and get going.'

"Kit watched the young officers disappear quietly in the gloom, then he heard more Indians scouring the forest to run them down. Kit used all his woodcraft to dodge around them and go back to the crescent formation of conical lodges on the open flat. In a way he was favored by the fact that most of the braves had entered the forest in search of the lost prisoners. It looked like a deserted en-

campment when he got clear of the timber, although he knew there were plenty of fighting squaws still around to interfere with his rescue of the three girls. He stopped in his tracks in the shadow of the first group of lodges as his ears suddenly caught the cry of the Phantom Rider somewhere on the prairie beyond the village. He knew the Indians feared this unknown and would give her a wide berth, so he stole toward the sound of her wailing voice."

Kit meets the mysterious woman rider outside the village. He has never been this close to her before. Evidently she knows about their capture because she asks what has become of the other prisoners and why he is free. Kit explains. The Phantom Rider says if he can find the three girls and meet her at the blasted pine a half mile up the river, she will cut out enough ponies from the Sioux herd to mount four people. She assures Kit no Indian herder will stand against her because of the belief that she is from the spirit world.

The young ranger slips up on Black Wolf's lodge, knowing the Leigh cousins were taken there, and he finds not only Winnie and Beth but, to his great relief, his brave sister, no longer arrayed as Vashti, medicine woman. The Indian women, more interested in the search going forward in the nearby forest than watching girl prisoners, only became aware of their flight at the last moment. With the three girls hurrying ahead of him, Kit fired over the heads of the squaws and discouraged pursuit beyond the limits of the village.

They meet the Phantom Rider at the blasted pine with four Indian ponies in tow. It is fortunate all hands can ride bareback. "The girls were much interested, even a little awed by the presence of the mysterious woman rider, white-clad, white-haired, her sad dark eyes fastened intently upon their faces. She urged them to mount quickly and handed Kit the rifle from her saddle-scabbard, saying: 'You're probably a better shot than I am, and I see you have only a hand-gun. Here, take this belt of shells,' and she un-

buckled the cartridge-studded belt around her waist.

"Kit hoped, with the girls along, there'd be no need to use the rifle loaned him. Near dawn a halt was called to rest the ponies in a snug little valley. A distant thumping like low thunder disturbed the pre-dawn quiet. Kit was first to identify it, laying ear to the earth. He leaped up, exclaiming, "Buffs stampeding, coming this way!" He ran to the excited ponies. The Phantom Rider's big white horse was rearing on its stake-rope. But the young ranger shook his head as he watched that shaggy herd coming at a gallop. He was listening to the hoofs of doom unless something approaching a miracle happened in the next few moments. He called sharply:

"Everybody lend a hand getting these horses and ourselves behind that dike of smooth-faced rock. We'll make a stand there."

"Back of the narrow rocky barrier which seemed to lie almost directly in the path of the rushing buffaloes, the ground quaked beneath Kit'soccasins as he faced about, levering a shell into the Winchester. Hanging to the frantic horses, the Phantom Rider and the three girls had their hands full. In three shots, rolling almost into one, three huge bulls reared, pawed the air with forehoofs and crashed down. Kit blazed away, piling them up to the last bullet in the Winchester. His fingers flew to reload; again the rifle spanged, the bellowing of the buffaloes awesome as those who could spread out on two sides of the fallen and continued their wild flight.

"Kit was sweating hard as he lowered the rifle. 'Well,' he said, that was close . . ."

There is not too much left to tell or the space to tell it. The sad-eyed Phantom Rider's story came out at the campfire; she was speaking to the brother and sister:

"For long years I have watched over you two children, followed in your footsteps when you were hunting, scouting or fishing, for you have ever reminded me of my own dear

lad and lassie who were torn from my arms by that fiend in human form, Renaud, the half-breed renegade and murderer. 'Twas he who stole my babes, he who killed their father, my dear, kind husband, and left me alone in the world, the poor wretch you see before you. Oh, when I stop to think of my wrongs, I am mad, mad!

"With the cry of some tortured creature in agony, the poor woman seemed yet unable to find relief in tears. She felt a cool little hand slipped into hers, while a tender, sympathetic voice said:

"'Never mind, if it hurts so to tell your story do not torment yourself by going on with it—need she, Kit?' and Kit shook his head, 'Yes, both my brother and I know that often when danger was nigh you appeared to warn us. But how did you frighten the Indians so?'

"'That was easy enough,' the strange mortal answered. 'A long white robe over my hunting suit, smeared with phosphorus to give it that eerie glow; that, together with my white hair and the large white horse I rode, made up the Phantom Rider. When I wished to vanish I simply threw a dark blanket over myself and horse.'

And Renaud did not escape her avenging hand at the last, although she herself did not deliver the blow that struck him down.

"Down on the plain the last rays of the dying sun shone upon the swiftly moving lines of cavalry, flashing from brass buttons as though from so much solid gold. It lighted up eager, impatient faces, some of them set and stern with grim determination in every line—like the faces of Lieutenants McMurdo and Campbell, riding double with a couple of troopers. Sun-glow glanced from deadly arms, sabres and carbines and service revolvers, and in every heart hope arose as they neared the flatland where stood the Sioux village, to free the weak and punish the guilty. McMurdo and Campbell, afoot, had been slogging toward Fort Leigh when the cavalry, led by the anxious General Leigh

himself, appeared on the trail. The General was only too glad to have the officers guide him to Black Wolf's band and that black-hearted Renaud, who called himself 'Maya' and had deceived the general completely.

"The Sioux saw the dust of the 6th Cavalry and the women were sent to strike the tepees while the braves formed up for battle. One thing that worried the general and the two young officers was how to reach the girls, supposed still to be in the village, without their being destroyed at the moment of rescue . . . This was prevented by a young buckskin-clad rider on an Indian pony, who darted over a knoll to gallop alongside General Leigh; and at the news, the good news delivered by Kit Carter, the graybearded officer's eyes lighted, he uttered a heartfelt expression of gratitude and turned to the trooper riding on his left, a pace or two to the rear:

"'Bugler, sound the charge!'

"Renaud was found after the battle, shot through the heart; and Black Wolf, seeing Kit Carter on a narrow stone ledge above the encampment, crept up and sought to hurl the young ranger to his death on the sharp rocks beneath. But it was the war chief who went down, not Kit . . .

"Long has sweet Winnie, the flower of the wilderness, been the wife of Kit Carter, now chief of scouts at Fort Leigh. While brave Ned Campbell won the heart of Nell Carter, and the gentle Beth became the bride of the other gallant Scotch lad, Donald McMurdo. Thus we leave them."

The End

Back numbers Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup, Nos. 1 to 237, some reprints, 12 for \$1.00 or all for \$21. Sent postpaid. You also get Dime Novel Catalogue, Birthday No. 2, indexes, #1 Pioneer and Scouts of the West.

Can you beat it?

Ralph F. Cummings
161 Pleasant St.

So. Grafton, Mass. 01560

RECENTLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES CONCERNING DIME NOVELS

RELICS, October 1969. Published by Western Publications, P. O. Box 3668, Austin, Texas 78704. NICKEL THRILLERS, by J. Edward Leithead. Profusely illustrated. An excellent article by the Roundup's ace writer.

NRTA JOURNAL, November-December 1969. Published by Retired Teachers Association, Andrus Bldg., 215 Long Beach Blvd., Long Beach, Cal. 90802. AMERICA'S MOST POPULAR CHARACTER, by Richard W. O'Donnell. A tribute to Frank Merriwell. Some errors of fact but an excellent addition to the Merriwell lore.

AMERICAN BOOK COLLECTOR September 1969. Published by W. H. Thorsen, 1822 School St., Chicago, Ill. 60657. THE DIAMOND DICKS: FRONTIER LAWMEN by J. Edward Leithead. Another excellent article by the busy Mr. Leithead. Excellently illustrated 8 Diamond Dick covers.

REAL WEST, January 1970. Published by Charlton Publications, Charlton Bldg., Derby, Conn. 06418. With the January Issue, Real West begins a series in their REAL WEST PICTORIAL entitled DIME NOVELS THAT GLORIFIED THE WEST. The January issue features Young Wild West. The February issue pictures the Rough Rider Weekly.

Q. I recently ran across one of the Frank Merriwell books that I reveled in as a boy. Rereading it was a shattering experience. What had seemed to me wonderfully exciting adventures now proved to be stilted, archaic suspense tales. Among the odd phrases was one that I guess I must have understood 40 years ago but it certainly puzzles me now. At one point Frank says that when he catches a certain ruffian he is going to make him "walk Spanish." I can't imagine what he means. Can you?—A. Swenson, Orange, N. J.

A. In the days of piracy on the

Spanish Main a favorite trick of pirates was to lift their captives by the scruff of the neck and make them walk with their toes barely touching the deck. It's a painful experience, I should judge, especially since the walk was usually punctuated with lusty blows from behind. Matter of fact, it scarcely sounds worthy of so noble a hero as Frank Merriwell, though I'm sure the scoundrel was indeed dastardly and these would be his "just desserts."

—From Words, Wit and Wisdom column by William and Mary Morris, Milwaukee Journal, September 26, 1969. (Sent in by Harry L. Lane)

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Dear Ed:

I consider the Roundup a real link to the past, as far as good literature is concerned. I often think of the difference between such stories as the Liberty Boys of '76, the Merriwells, Work and Win, etc., and the modern stuff of today.

I can see Dick Slater of the Liberty Boys, going into a tavern and ordering a glass of buttermilk while doing spy work against the British. And Fred Fearnot was very outspoken against strong drink. And the Merriwells, along with the other good characters of the times, had such respect for the girls. But the modern literature of today, Wow!!!!

So keep the good ole "Dime Novel Roundup" coming down my way.

—Wallace H. Waldrop, Greenville, S. C.

Dear Ed: I found the article on Horatio Alger very interesting. How about one about Stratemeyer, Alger's successor? Also would like to know about Wild West Weekly Magazine after it was taken over by Street & Smith. I only saw one copy of this magazine but I think it was about Billy West. Who was he? What finally became of the magazine? Harry Weatherbee, New Waterford, N.S. (Can anyone help Mr. Weatherbee with his questions?)

NEWSY NEWS

By Ralph F. Cummings

Gerald McIntosh wrote me, "Ralph, several years ago when the Merriwell strip was running in the newspapers, did you save it and make a Scrap Book of them? If you have a set of them, do you want to sell them? If you don't have a set, do you know of anyone who saved a set of them, who would be likely to want to sell them? I do hope I can get hold of a set of them, somehow. Wish you could help me out on this." I wish I could too.

Along in 1960, Bill Burns wrote me that James Martin had a run of "Our Boys," a story paper, from nos. 14 to 45, as well as some odd numbers. Wonder what ever became of them? Jim sure had some very rare stuff and I guess every Tom, Dick and Harry got it after he died, as his collection was in a warehouse, and so long, when the rent wasn't paid, the owner sold it all off for what he could get. Too bad. Jim never trusted any one, for fear they would want items he didn't want to let go.

I've been asked what ever became of all those coverless bound vols. of Novels I once had. Guess they are pretty well scattered around by now.

George Sahr is still sweet on lots of the old nickel novels as well as the dime novels too, especially the James Boys in the New York Detective Library.

P. J. Moran loves the old timers,

but can't read them on account of his eyes—no one knows what he is up against, when they go back on them.

Clyde Wakefield gets on the trail of real good old timers now and then and when he does get them, he doesn't hang onto them long, as he can always get rid of them. Clyde had a heck of a time with his eyes for over a year. Then he had one of them operated on for cataracts, and he says he feels like a new man now.

Same goes for the wife of Frank C. Acker. That's one thing, we have to watch our eyes.

We don't hear much from Ross Crauford, maybe he is waiting for me to write him, like I am waiting for him, who will win?

Bob Chenu is interested in boys' books, such as Leo Edwards and William Heyliger, as well as Ralph H. Barbour.

Peter Scoll's sure has his hands full around this time. He only needs a few Secret Service to complete his set.

Joe C. Kaelin was a great reader of James Boys stories, so if you have any of his wants, get in touch with him. And to think when I was down in St. Louis, Mo., a couple of years ago, I forgot to visit with him—I never even thought of it, until after I got back home—how I missed seeing him, I don't know, shame on me.

Carl Linville has been very sick, but we hear that he is now on the mend, so we are all rootin for you, Carl.

FOR SALE: Almost 100 very old NICKEL NOVELS that I have taken the covers off for my collection of Automobile Covers. While they last 50¢ each. Also a lot of Duplicate Nickel Novels that have cars on the covers at \$3.00 each. Many go back to 1906.

I also have a random lot of the real old time Nickel Novels in many names at \$2.00 each.

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HARRY PULFER

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MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

298. Roger A. Merriam, Eastman Road, RD #1, No. Syracuse, N. Y. 13212 (New member)
299. Mrs. Roy E. Morris, 901 East Michigan Ave., Orlando, Fla. 32806 (New)
300. William B. Shillingberg, 213 East Bell Ave., Fairfield, Cal. 94533 (New)
252. Tom Dino, 511 19th St., Union City, N. J. 07087 (New address)

Mrs. Mary T. Waggaman, author of romances, died on Friday, July 31, 1931 at the ripe old age of 85. She was a native of Baltimore, Md., and had been a resident of Washington for more than 60 years. She was the widow of Dr. Samuel J. Waggenerman who died in 1913. A professional writer since girlhood, Mrs. Waggenerman was the author of numerous serials, short stories and poems. She had also written more than 35 childrens books.

Albert Farmer says a while back in an issue of the True West Magazine, where the Southwestern Mag of Columbus, New Mexico was giving away a free reprint copy of "Wide Awake Library" #451, containing the "True Life of Billy the Kid," with cover in three colors, to everyone sub-

scribing to the magazine. Since the "Wide Awake Library" had Black & White covers, the three color cover should be interesting to say the least.

You know, I do believe Herbert Kenney is the champion book and novel reader in existence. He reads from 5 to 8 different books and novels at a time. Know anyone else that can beat that record?

OLD PULP MAGAZINES WANTED

Such as Doc Savage, Shadow, Spider, Unknown, Phantom, Western Story, Wild West, G-S, Wings, "spicy" mags and many others in the all-fiction field. Must be in excellent condition. What have you? Send list and price wanted. No comics or books.

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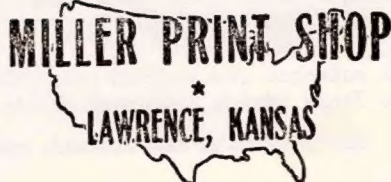
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